

Public Questions for 29 January Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Question 1: Chairperson of Federation of Cambridge Residents

I should like to ask a question on behalf of the Federation of Cambridge Residents about the use of the general fund to pay for the refurbishment of the Guildhall, Corn Exchange and Cambridge market Square. Item 6 on the agenda. The BBC reported that “The Guildhall, Corn Exchange & the Market Square in Cambridge could all be refurbished as part of a £20 million project and that the £20 million would come from the council’s general reserve”. Residents say there has been no consultation about these plans or the vision for the city centre and that there is no mention of Cambridge’s traditional market or of the market traders. This is important because at the last market square stakeholders’ meeting the CEO of Cambridge Bid told attendees a bid for investment in the city centre was going out to tender and that the vision for the city centre would be commercially driven and not civic.

Cambridge residents ask why there has been no public disclosure of the discussions about using the General Fund for this, which involves large sums of taxpayer money and impacts world famous city spaces and people’s livelihoods?

Question 2:

Re proposals for a civic quarter reserve, my questions are about financing and designs.

Back in 2022 I wrote a blogpost with some thoughts on how the guildhall could be revamped at <https://cambridgetownowl.com/2022/10/16/revamp-cambridges-guildhall-in-time-for-florence-ada-keynes-mayoral-centenary-1932-2032/> which included lifting the existing council chamber up a level to create space for a state-of-the-art lecture hall for the conferencing industry, creating a rooftop cafe, and revamping the facade of the guildhall in time for Florence Ada Keynes' mayoral centenary.

Furthermore, over the years I have also suggested converting the Corn Exchange to enable both a top floor open space as well as either start-up space or an indoor market in return for building a new concert hall opposite the Catholic Church, part-financed by the University as Sir Ivor Jennings QC, the former Vice Chancellor, committed the University to doing on 31 May 1962 (see <https://lostcambridge.wordpress.com/2021/10/06/vice-chancellor-sir-ivor-jennings-qc-says-cambridge-university-has-a-duty-to-improve-the-city-and-says-university-will-contribute-50-of-the-cost-of-a-new-large-public-hall-1962/>)

In commissioning RIBA to undertake a design competition, please could the council ensure that the parameters take into account the proposals that I've put forward so we don't end up with a design that was as unpopular as the present guildhall's design was back in the 1930s - see here <https://lostcambridge.wordpress.com/2017/08/29/florence-ada-keynes-gets-it-in-the-neck-from-cambridge-over-new-guildhall-designs/>